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Daniel — Development of music in America during first half of 19th century



THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC IN AMERICA DURING THE  
FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY

RUTH DANIEL

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THESIS

FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF MUSIC

IN

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SCHOOL OF MUSIC

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

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.....June 14.....1919.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

MISS RUTH DANIEL

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IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF.....BACHELOR OF MUSIC.....

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## The Development of Music in America During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century.

### INTRODUCTION

The history of the development of music in any nation begins always with a study of the songs of the people of the nation for it is those songs, as a rule, which form the foundation of all later musical development.

Since America is made up of such a mixture of peoples from various nations and the industrial rather than the poetical class of people at that, it has been rather hard to determine just what is her folk-song. In truth, we can not say that American music has been built upon the folk-song of any one of the many different nationalities which happen to make up her mixed population, for, they have each had their influence in greater or less degree upon the development of an American music.

During the early days of colonization, the people were too busy securing the necessities of life and establishing a home to pay any attention whatever to music or creative beauty of any sort. Later on, when the first hardships were over, they began to take an interest in music along with other elements of culture, especially in the southern colonies. In the northern colonies, however, where the Puritans held sway, instruments and all other forms of music except Psalm-singing were forbidden. They, there-



fore, were slower than their southern neighbors in developing an interest in music. But, by the time of the Revolution, there was an interest in music in the colonies which kept pace with that of England and the European countries. It is interesting to note that the men who were the most vitally interested in music, who held concerts of chamber music in their homes and took part in the performance even, were men of influence in political and business affairs also. Such has not been the general rule, as it was then, since the close of the Revolution.

The country was still too new to have many composers of any rank and none of high rank excepting for their historical importance. William Billings, the Psalm-writer from New England, is generally considered as the first American composer but, of course, his writings are only important in that they represent the beginnings of creative impulse among the common people of America.

The Revolutionary War naturally aroused patriotic emotions which always give rise to inspiration for song writing. The patriotic songs written at the time, however, used borrowed tunes.

But, at any rate, we had already established an interest in music in America by the end of the eighteenth century and were ready to begin to develop that interest.

#### MUSICAL ORGANIZATIONS

At the beginning of the nineteenth century we find the musical life of the country as well as all other social life, divided into two sections, the North with New York, Boston and





Philadelphia as centers and the South with Charleston and New Orleans as centers. Records of the musical activities of these cities form the main substance of the musical history of America but it is thought that further research will reveal facts about the life of the smaller cities which will be very interesting and enlightening.

Musical organizations which had their beginnings long before the Revolutionary War in some places formed the background of all musical activities, each city had its own organizations and the societies of a number of cities or towns in a small area would go together and form associations. There is no doubt but that these societies had a great influence upon the development of the music of America even though they did not reach the majority of the people of the country. For out of them grew the great Orchestral and Choral Societies which exist today and which are a great source of instruction and entertainment to the people.

The Enterpean Society of New York was one of the chief instrumental organizations at this time and the parent of the Philharmonic Society which is still prominent today. The Enterpean has been criticised as being somewhat indifferent but their programs show that they did a high grade of work. The program of their concert of 1839 includes compositions of Herold, Auber, Bellini, Boehm, Purcell, Rossini and Thalberg. Then too their orchestra was of sufficiently good symphonic proportions. It consisted of six first violins, five second violins, four tenors, three 'celli, two contra-basses, four flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two kettle drums, drum and cymbals.





The Philharmonic Society which followed the Euterpean Society is not to be confused with earlier societies of the same name which were in all probability vocal organizations. The present Philharmonic grew out of an agitation for an organization made up of professional musicians for the purpose of giving concerts of the highest class. Uriah C. Hill was the first leader and a very able and energetic man for the place. From the beginning the society concentrated its efforts on the works of masters such as Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Schumann. In 1854 the society suffered for the first but not the only time during its existence from a revolt of some of its members against concentration on the works of the German masters to the exclusion of all others. There was no permanent conductor for the orchestra until 1866 when Carl Bergmann became sole conductor for a period of ten years. During that time he brought before the people of New York the compositions of Liszt, Wagner, Raff and Rubinstein. He was followed by Leopold Damrosch who after one year was followed by Theodore Thomas who will always be remembered for the value of his work in cultivating the musical taste of New York concert-goers. He absolutely refused to descend from his ideal of good music to that of the concert-goers. He absolutely refused to descend from his ideal of good music to that of the concert-going public and therefore they had to ascend to him.

However, since his activities did not come within the first half of the century we must not spend more time on them. Boston also had a Philharmonic society which was founded about 1799 by Gottlieb Graupner. Nothing much is known about it except that



the society gave regular concerts the last of which took place in 1824. After the Philharmonic passed out of existence, Boston was without a permanent symphonic organization until 1840 when the Academy of Music established an Orchestra. This organization varied in size from twenty-five to forty performers, many of whom were amateurs. It introduced to Boston most of the standard symphonies and some other works of importance but its ambition seems to have been greater than its ability. It was succeeded by the Musical Fund Society which lasted only until 1855.

Philadelphia did not even have any instrumental organizations of influence during the eighteenth century and therefore still continued to lack them during the first half of the nineteenth century when there was a general decline all over the country in the public demand for music of the best kind. Especially does the South seem to have lost interest in concerts and instrumental organizations at this time for there is no account given of such interests after the last half of the eighteenth century.

Instrumental music really did not become popular in America until the last half of the nineteenth century and for that reason we will find that choral societies were more numerous during the first half of the century.

Greatest among these is the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston which is the oldest choral organization still in existence. The society was founded in 1815 from a chorus which had been brought together to celebrate the signing of the treaty of peace in Ghent on December 25, 1814. Two hundred and fifty singers and an orchestra of fifty performers made up the organization in its





infancy so we see that it was no small undertaking. The first concert was appropriately confined to works of Handel and Haydn and miscellaneous choral works still made up the programs of succeeding concerts until the year 1818. On December 25 of that year the "Messiah" was given in complete form for probably the first time in America.

The tenor part was given to the womens' voices, (which at first were in the minority), the men taking the air until Lowell Mason became President of the Society in 1827. The President and Conductor were one and the same person until the year 1847 when the two offices were separated.

Besides its work in the performance of master choral compositions the society in early life acted as sponsors to several musical publications among which are the "Bridgewater Collection" and the "Handel and Haydn Collection of Hymns and Anthems" by Lowell Mason.

There were many other societies in New England which had their beginnings in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The only one of importance however was the Stoughton Musical Society which was an outgrowth of a singing school formed by Billings in 1774. This society is important only in that it forms a connecting link between the early Singing School and later choral associations and it was the first society to be formed among the people rather than among professionals.

In the South there were many musical organizations of importance in the eighteenth century and the St. Cecilia Society of Charleston, South Carolina which was founded in 1762 lasted well



on into the nineteenth century. This choral society had its own orchestra and was semi-private in character. At the beginning of the nineteenth century however Charleston saw a decline in the public demand for good choral music as did other cities all over America and this one organization seems to have been the only one of importance which still lived and prospered on into the century.

Although New York has always been one of the most important musical centers of America she fell behind somewhat in interest in oratorio during the early years of the nineteenth century.

The Choral Society, founded as late as 1823, did the first serious work in oratorio. The program of its initial concert given April 20, 18<sup>24</sup>, contained selections from the "Messiah", the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Beethoven's "Mount of Olives" and Mozart's motet, "O God, when Thou appearest."

The Choral Society soon dissolved leaving its work to the New York Sacred Music Society. The latter organization caused quite a stir by engaging a professional singer, Madame Malibrau, for the concert of 1827. The Society took up the study of Oratorio seriously under U. C. Hill in 1831 and gave the "Messiah" in full on November 18 in St. Paul's Chapel. The membership of the Society consisted of seventy-four voices and an orchestra of thirty-eight performers. Annual concerts were given until 1849 when the work was taken up by the New York Harmonic Society which gave its first public performance on May 10, 1850, the "Messiah" making up the program. On November 9th of the same year the performance was repeated with Jenny Lind as soloist.





In Cincinnati the first serious Oratorio work was taken up by the Haydn Society as early as 1819. The main contribution of this Society to the development of music was the promotion of an interest in music in the West which was instrumental in forming other organizations among which were the Episcopal Singing Society and the Euterpean, founded in 1823, and the Sacred Music Society founded in 1840. Through the influence of these various organizations, Cincinnati received her start in musical life which makes her today one of the leading musical cities of America.

Chicago's musical life which we hear so much about at present did not begin to develop until after the middle of the century and does not hold a place in this discussion.

St. Louis had its singing schools in 1837 and the Oratorio Society was organized by Charles Bahner in 1845.

There has been a number of foreign musical organizations in this country which have exerted no little influence on the development of American music. Since they were not founded for the most part until near the middle of the century, I will mention only one here which was founded as early as 1841. This was the Moravian Settlement of Bethlehem Pennsylvania which instituted the Bach Festival, a musical event which still is maintained and is now one of the most important musical affairs of the country.

One of the most important phases of the development of music in America has been church music and the church choir. The history of the development of church music from the very simple hymn or Psalm-tunes of the New Englanders, which were sung without instrumental accompaniment, up to the latter part of the eighteenth cen-



tury.

The condition in which we find it was a sorry one. The choirs had entirely forgotten that their purpose was merely to lead the singing of the congregation and instead had taken to singing music which the congregation could not take part in or even understand and enjoy. In fact, the main purpose of the choir seemed to be to see which part could outdo the other in singing the fugal style of music which was prevalent at that time. Not only was the congregation unable to take part in the singing but even the choir members themselves were unable to get through some of the songs. The difficulty of the music thus led to introducing people into the choirs who were able to sing the complicated style of songs whether they were in sympathy with the service or not which, in turn, led to the general reputation for mis-behavior among such organizations.

These abuses soon became intolerable and in 1790 the question of doing away entirely with music in the church was brought up for the second time but a reform was started instead.

The first reformers turned back to the hymn and psalm-tune as a safe base from which to take another start. The old controversy against the use of instruments was again revived but, in spite of all the opposition, the use of instruments in the church became general. The question of the distribution of parts was disputed among the musicians themselves for sometime and the air, which had hitherto been taken always by the men's voices, was finally given to the women in 1825. The singing of solos and duets which had always been considered immodest came to be practiced about this time also.





One of the best and most prominent of the early choirs was that of the Park Street Church in Boston. The church had no organ until well on into the nineteenth century and the choir was accompanied by a flute, a bassoon and a violoncello. The members of the choir numbered about fifty and their singing was of the highest order. Many of the original members of the famous Handel and Haydn Society came out of this choir.

The first boy choir was established by Reverend Francis Hawks, D.D., of St. Paul's College, Flushing, Long Island, about 1839. There was a great deal of objection to surplices but boys voices for choirs became generally used, in Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches for the most part. Later on they adopted the surplices without objection.

The three men who were most influential in reforming the music of the church were Thomas Hastings (1787-1872), Nathaniel Gould (1789-1854), and Lowell Mason (1792-1872). These men augmented the small repertory of hymns by compositions of their own. To them music was a factor subservient to religious purposes and their compositions were for congregational singing rather than for choirs.

Hastings and Gould were both singing masters and the latter was the first to introduce the teaching of children to sing.

Mason was more liberal than the other two. In fact he was far in advance of his time and the importance of his work cannot be overestimated. He saw to it that the music was correctly and fittingly harmonized and also that it was properly sung. The Boston Handel and Haydn Collection of Music, published in 1822, was his first compilation of church music. The first works of their



kind which were respectable from a musical standpoint, they became very popular.

Lowell Mason has been very properly termed, "The Father of Church Music in America" but that was not his only field of labor as we shall see from the following chapter.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF GENERAL MUSICAL EDUCATION.

So far we have discussed the development of American music from the standpoint of the "cultured few" rather than from the standpoint of the general public, for, as a rule, musical organizations have been exclusive affairs. As we have seen, these organizations had a great share in the development of our music and in promoting an interest in and cultivating a taste for the best music which thus far, had all to be imported from Europe, but a nation cannot become really musical until a knowledge of music becomes more general. One has only to think of the musical life of some of the European countries to realize the truth of this statement. In Germany especially every child was expected to know at least something about music and, as a result, that country has given us a great number of master musicians.

Therefore, it is with a feeling of hopefulness for the future of American music that we trace the beginnings of general musical education in this country although we are only now, about a century later, beginning to see results.

The country singing schools were the first organizations which were instrumental in spreading a knowledge of music among the general public. These were established as early as the first





part of the eighteenth century, their original purpose being to improve the singing of the church.

The most important early singing school masters were William Billings of New England who, as we have noted before, was the first hymn writer of America; William Tuckey of New York who came over from England; and Andrew Adgate of Philadelphia whose efforts to spread the knowledge of music among the general public were instrumental in developing the musical appreciation of Philadelphia to a degree that surpassed that of New York and Boston.

Every little country town and every community had its singing school the members sometimes riding on horse-back through the mud for miles to attend the weekly or fortnightly meetings. The main purpose of the schools was to teach singing by note and this they accomplished surprisingly well.

The Singing School finally led to the musical convention in which a number of societies went together and held a meeting for three or four days. They conducted classes in which the various branches of music were taught; gave concerts of a mixed character; and gave lectures for the attraction of non-musical people.

The first one of these conventions was conducted by Moses E. Cheney at Montpelier, Vermont, May 22-23, 1839. He was assisted by Elizah K. Prouty who was the first singing master in Vermont to adopt the Pestalozzian system of instruction in his singing schools. He also introduced the modern method of beating time and the use of syllables and was the first to use the blackboard by way of illustration. This first convention proved so successful that other conventions were held regularly in Vermont for about five years.



The musical festival finally took the place of the convention during the last half of the nineteenth century and at the same time the singing school began to pass out of existence.

The Schools of Music established in Pennsylvania, one by the Moravians in Bethlehem in 1750 and the other by the Musical Fund Society in Philadelphia in 1825 were only of local influence. The Boston Academy of Music established in 1833 by Lowell Mason, George J. Webb, William C. Woodbridge and Hon. Samuel A. Eliot, was therefore the first institution which had a wide-spread influence on the development of American music. The Academy established normal classes and sent its graduates through every section of the country. It trained children in choral work. It gave to Boston her first orchestra and during the first years of its life conducted choral concerts but this part of the work was soon left to the choral organization of the city.

Mr. Woodbridge who had studied the Pestalozzian system of education in Europe aroused Mr. Mason's interest in the system and together they introduced it into the Academy.

The main purpose of the founders of this institution was to extend "to the people" a means of becoming acquainted with music and they adhered to this purpose so closely that they did not consider the material profits sufficiently and the institution had to close its doors for lack of funds in 1847.

However in spite of its short life of fourteen years the Academy exerted a nation wide influence on the establishment of general education in music by introducing music into the public schools not only as a means of recreation but also as a study.





Mason and Woodbridge established a course in music in the Public Schools of Boston in 1836 and carried it on as an experiment for two years when the school board, assured of its success, took it up.

In New York a man by the name of Darius E. Jones conceived the idea of forming singing classes in the schools which he taught without compensation. After a trial the school board gave him permission to continue the work provided no expense was incurred and regular lessons were not interfered with. A regularly compensated course was not established in the New York schools until 1853.

Singing was introduced into the public schools of Cincinnati by T. B. Mason, the brother of Lowell Mason. Pittsburgh began such instruction in 1840.

Nathaniel D. Gould who has been mentioned once before as the first to teach children to sing organized childrens singing classes in New England, New York and New Jersey from the year 1820 onward.

A discussion of musical education would not be complete without a word about the influence of foreign musicians and teachers. The Germans with their usual aggressiveness exerted the most influence. However, German musicians did not come over to this country for the express purpose of educating it musically. The first German teachers were members of bands which had failed because the American public was not able to appreciate the class of music which they had to offer. On account of their consistent failures they were forced to dissolve and the individual members generally became private teachers in the localities where they



happened to be stranded.

Not alone by teaching but also by musical publications and in the work of organizing societies was the foreign influence felt. Gottlieb Graupner had much to do with the musical life of Boston in this way and his efforts in forming the musical taste of that city had an effect all over the country.

Because of the interest of the people of Philadelphia in music, which had been developed by Andrew Adgate, foreign musicians were attracted to that city. Filippo Trajetta was one of the most important of the musicians who thus received encouragement from the atmosphere of Philadelphian musical life. He was a Venetian and landed in Boston in 1799. He traveled through the South as a theatrical manager and finally settled in Philadelphia, teaching and composing until his death in 1854. "Washington's Dead March" was his most popular composition. "Rudiments of the Art of Singing" was published by him as a text book for the American Conservatorio, an institution which had been established in Philadelphia by one of his pupils, Uri C. Hill.

A few English musicians had no little part in developing the taste of the musical life of America. Dr. G. J. Jackson lived in Boston from 1812 on and was the leading choir master of his day. He taught American choirs the English method of chanting. William Tuckey, New York's early singing school master, was also an Englishman.

In the colleges and Universities of the country the value of music began to be recognized before the middle of the century although a regular course in music was not established in any of





the institutions of higher learning until later.

At Harvard a singing fraternity called the Pierean Sodality, was established as early as 1808. This organization may be reckoned as the first step toward a Department of Music in that University. In 1837 the alumni members of this organization formed the Harvard Musical Association which promoted chamber music concerts and the production of great symphonies and also collected a large music library.

The Handel Society of Dartmouth College did a noble work while it existed but it soon died out for lack of members.

Thus, we see that during the first half of the nineteenth century it was only the "beginnings" of musical education that we had but, by the end of that period, our musical educational advantages, which are as adequate as those of Europe today if people only knew it, had a fair start.

#### AMERICAN CREATIVE MUSIC

Since it is still doubtful whether America has a true indigenous folk-song or not we cannot say that her creative music has followed any one of the various kinds of folk-song that may be found within her borders. During this period which we are here discussing, however, the music of the negroes was very prominent all over the country and had its effect on the few composers of this period.

The negro minstrels who had such an absorbing interest for the amusement-seeking public during this time were the originators of the imitation negro song. Most of the minstrel song writers



have been forgotten but two names remain which will always be remembered as the first of the original composers of music among the people. Their songs have come to be regarded as folk-songs although in a true sense they are not folk-songs because they were composed by individuals.

Only one of the two was a minstrel, Daniel Emmett, and his fame rests on just one of his songs, the famous "Dixie." He wrote many other popular and original tunes, such as "Old Dan Tucker" and "Early in the Morning," but none of them have ever been as popular as "Dixie." Emmett was an Ohio man and a member of Dan Bryant's minstrel show for which he wrote the song a few years before the Civil War.

The other name is that of Stephen Collins Foster who was not a minstrel but wrote the minstrel style of songs. He was born in Lawrenceburg, Pennsylvania, in 1826 of southern parents. He had no real musical training, in fact, he was afraid that too much training would impair his originality. He lived a rather shiftless life because of his lack of self-discipline. His genius for song-writing and his poverty were both instrumental in causing him to write such a large number of songs, one hundred and sixty in all, during his rather short life. He died rather tragically at a cheap East Side hotel in New York in 1864, only thirty-eight years of age. There are a few of his songs which will always remain in the hearts of the people, "The Old Folks at Home", "My Old Kentucky Home," "Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground," and "Old Black Joe."

All of these minstrel songs were written in the style of





the negro song with stanzas and a chorus and also made use of the negro dialect in the words. For the most part they express the emotions of the negro such as longing, sorrow, and hope for better times to come.

Americas share in musical composition was not limited to the minstrel song writers along, for there were a few trained musicians who did some creative work. The most important name in this class is that of Louis Moreau Gottschalk who was born in New Orleans in 1829. He was influenced by negro music also but from a different group, that of the black Creoles of Louisiana. He made known to the world at large the peculiar charm of the Creole airs which were quite different from the negro songs because of the influence of their Creole masters on the character of both their songs and their dances.

He showed unusual talent as a child and his parents sent him to France to study music. When he returned to America he spent the most of his time in New York teaching and writing. He did a great deal for the development of American music in both of these capacities although his works may seem rather over-sentimental to us now. He wrote two operas, several orchestral compositions and many songs, but his piano compositions comprise the bulk of his works. We have his own words to explain his method of developing a love for piano music which he considered to be his mission: "I must be more practical: I must 'make clear' a pathway for piano music. I have begun by publishing such descriptive pieces as "The Banjo", much to the disgust of those who think I can't do better, and condemn me for debasing my genius. But what care I? I know the method by which I intend to develop a





love for piano music. It is an ungenerous nature who cannot 'stoop to conquer.' If I condescend to be attractive to the less intellectually appreciative I will make them love me and so follow me while I lead them step by step higher. I am willing to bear criticism: for, before I die, I am convinced my music will be appreciated, whether my motives are or not."\*

William H. Fry who was born in Philadelphia in 1813 has considerable claim to the title of "The first American Composer." His training was entirely European and his compositions for the most part were operas, of which, "Leonora" was the most successful. He died in 1864.

Two other songs of the people which go hand in hand with Foster's song in the hearts of the people are "Home Sweet Home" and "Ben Bolt". The former was a song from the opera, "Clari, the Maid of Milan" written by John Howard Paine and produced in New York on November 12, 1823. "Ben Bolt" was written in 1843 by Nelson Kneass.

For the most part musical composition during this period was not very pretentious but at least it was a beginning in that portion of musical development which has taken such wonderful strides since the Civil War period.

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"Life of Gottschalk" by Hensel, pp. 157-8



## CONCLUSION

Needless to say, the cause of music as an art did not advance very rapidly during the first half of the nineteenth century but yet a great many wonderful things were accomplished which served as a background, or better, as a starting point, for some of the advances which have been made since then. The great musical organizations, both orchestral and choral, which we enjoy today had their period of youth at this time; church music received a number of its best contributions from such men as Lowell Mason, Hastings and Gould; music was introduced into the public schools; and composers were beginning to make their appearance. Each one of these phases in the development of the music of this period will ever hold its place in our entire musical history as one of the first stepping stones to that high position in the music of the world which we hope to make ours someday.







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